



Vicksburg National Military Park Cultural Landscape Report and Environmental Assessment

June 2007

From the Superintendent –

Friends,

It has been decades since we worked together to analyze how the park's landscape meets the purpose of "[commemorating] the campaign and siege and defense of Vicksburg." One of the ways Congress directed us to fulfill our mandate was to "restore the forts and the lines of fortification, the parallels and the approaches of the two armies, or so much thereof as may be necessary to the purposes of the park." In order to determine what landscape modifications are needed, we invite you to learn more about the effort underway and offer your ideas for consideration in this process. This newsletter provides details of the upcoming open house and instructions for submitting your comments.



As you know, Vicksburg National Military Park commemorates one of the most complex and protracted campaigns of the Civil War, involving joint operations between the Union army and navy; a strategic objective; and tactics of diversion, siege, and defense. Its monuments comprise one of the largest collections of memorializing military art honoring Civil War soldiers and sailors in the country. Additionally, the park is a unit of the National Park Service and is managed to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

This legal direction will guide us as we identify the park's landscape at various time periods, identify features that were significant in determining battle tactics and outcomes, understand how the siege and defense unfolded day to day, identify other landscape features that are important to the park's purpose today, and develop alternatives for battlefield rehabilitation and other modifications including mitigation for environmental impacts. This process will focus on the battlefield area of approximately 1800 acres and 150 acres owned by the City of Vicksburg.

To be successful, this process will be informed by research on the ground, from the administrative records, and from public comments. We have hired a contractor, Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., to help with the research and developing the alternatives. Another contractor, to be hired soon, will help with analyzing impacts and identifying advantages of the various alternatives.

The next step is for us to meet with you to convey what we know about the history of the landscape and hear your opinions. Following this initial public comment period, we will develop a list of landscape features (physical, visual, and functional) and propose various alternatives prioritizing these features for preservation, rehabilitation, or some other treatment option. We will then again seek your input on the proposed alternatives. Following the second public comment period, we will publish the draft plan and request more input before publishing the final document. The entire process should take approximately 10 to 12 months.

I hope you can see that your involvement is needed. Please attend the open house to learn more and submit your comments on-line, through the mail, or at the public meeting. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

*Monika Mayr
Superintendent
Vicksburg National Military Park*

Open House and Submitting Comments –

Vicksburg National Military Park and Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., will hold an open house to present current research findings on the Cultural Landscape Report and Environmental Assessment, and request public input and comments.

Date: June 26, 2007
Time: 3:00 – 7:00 pm
Place: Vicksburg National Military Park
Address: 3201 Clay Street
Vicksburg, MS 39183
(handicapped accessible)

Comments may also be submitted using the form on page 4 of this newsletter, or accessing the National Park Service public comment web site at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>

pres-er-va-tion (prēz ər-vā'-shən) *n.* The act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property.

re-ha-bil-i-ta-tion (rē'hā-bil'ə-tā-shən) *n.* The act or process of returning a property to a state of utility through repair or alteration that makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions or features...that are significant to its historical architectural, and cultural values.

res-to-ra-tion (rēs' tə-rā shən) *n.* The act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period.

(Secretary of the Interior's Standards, CFR, July 2005)

LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION

Created by actions of wind and water, Vicksburg's unique terrain can be attributed to the unusual dust-like loess soil composing the city's bluffs and the ongoing sculpting by the Mississippi River. Constant changes in the highly unstable river course cut off many meanders, forming oxbow lakes and backswamps bordered by natural levees. Long sections of abandoned channel formed bayous – slow-moving creeks – which followed the ancient river bed, creating a complex network of interconnecting waterways. Many were navigable by small steamboats, especially during high water, providing avenues for trade and transport. Naturally-drained backswamps filled with native plants including huge, dense stands of bald cypress, tupelo, willows, and oaks, and created habitat for countless animal species.

As one of few places where the mighty river met the valley wall, Vicksburg was prime territory for early settlement, and provided safety from yearly flooding. The city became a bustling river town and essential stopping and trans-shipping site for traffic on the Mississippi and rail lines on either side of the river. Wherever man and mule could work without tumbling into a ravine, ridge tops were cleared for farming, but gullies and

steep hillsides were left covered in tangled scrub. This altered landscape became crucial during time of war, with the clear, high vista and imposing terrain allowing that, *“No place on earth is favored by nature with natural defenses as Vicksburg...”*



Becoming the core of the city’s defenses in 1863, the high bluffs along the river provided such a defensive advantage that General Grant’s troops were prevented from taking the city by direct assaults, despite greatly outnumbering the Confederate forces. Construction of the Confederate defenses required most of the available timber to build parapets and stockades. Trees were felled to provide materials for constructing defensive fortifications, to maintain an unobstructed line of sight between the defensive positions, and to clear the line of fire between the combatants. This left only scattered trees dotting the battlefield, and further actions of the opposing armies left the area even more devoid of woody vegetation. Trenches were easily dug in the loess soil, while caves were excavated in the hillsides, protecting civilians and soldiers alike from shelling.

After the war, much of the area was returned to farmland and tilled until the early 1900s. In 1899, Congress established Vicksburg National Military Park, and after the turn of the century, much of this agricultural land was purchased for inclusion in the park. The formerly cultivated land began to revert back to the hardwood forest, canebrakes, and heavy catbrier tangle.



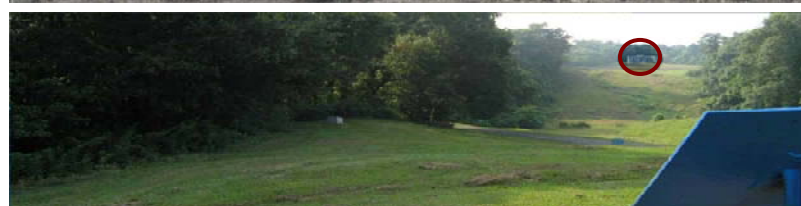
PAST MANAGEMENT

Today’s battlefield looks nothing as it did in 1863. Erosion control projects implemented by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s created a dense forest cover across the park landscape, while other areas were allowed to fill in naturally – efforts now realized to be only partially successful. Creating a mask over the trenches and ridgelines used by the troops during the siege, the forest cover seriously impacted the accuracy of *“condition(s) at the time of the battle,”* and the interpretive potential of the landscape. Time and modern earth-moving equipment also leveled a large portion of the area’s hills and ravines, greatly altering the landscape.

CURRENT STATUS

Park officials have determined that rehabilitation of various areas to their condition at the time of the siege would be beneficial not only to enhance visitor understanding, but for conservation and preservation of the cultural and natural resources within the park. In 2005, the park chose to undertake partial battlefield rehabilitation near Railroad Redoubt, an area composed of hilly terrain and covered with second-growth, mixed-hardwood forest. Trees were removed, while a riparian buffer strip of vegetation will be maintained along each side of the linear wetland running through the tract. Visitor understanding and appreciation of the role which this major defensive fortification played during this action have been greatly enhanced by this rehabilitation. The visitor is now better able to understand this important venue, and the military actions that occurred during the siege of the city.

Ecologically, the kudzu and privet infestation that had overtaken a significant portion of the Railroad Redoubt landscape was cleared, proving to be a positive impact on the park’s effort to combat these exotic plants.



Views of the Railroad Redoubt: Top – ca. early 1900s; Middle – 2005; Bottom – 2007. (Iowa Monument circled in each photo.)

METHODOLOGY

With the surrender of Vicksburg, the South lost not only an entire army and approximately 11% of its artillery, but control of the Mississippi River was secured by the Union, thereby cutting the Confederacy in two. Because of this critical and decisive influence on the control of the Mississippi River, and direct impact on the course of the war, Vicksburg National Military Park has been ranked a Class A battlefield by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission. To serve the purposes of the park and the National Park Service, we are beginning the process of developing a Cultural Landscape Report and Environmental Assessment to determine alternatives for landscape treatments.

Prioritization of rehabilitation and preservation of landscape features (physical, visual, and functional) will be decided by identifying and analyzing the following categories of landscape:

1. Military/Historic landscape – contributing to the strategy and conduct of the campaign and siege, or contributing to the experience of the individual soldier and/or citizen.
2. Commemorative landscape – serving the remembrance of the conflict and individuals who participated in the campaign and siege.
3. Ecological landscape – contributing to the natural terrain of the present-day biomes.
4. Visitor Services, Interpretive, and Educational landscape – contributing to the experience of current and future generations.
5. Administrative/Mitigative landscape – serving to enable the park to meet its purpose and mission.

To analyze the military landscape, we will use the time-honored technique of military terrain analysis – what is referred to as “KOCO,” a modern acronym which stands for Key Terrain, Observation and Fields of Fire, Cover and Concealment, Obstacles, and Avenues of Approach. Briefly, this entails:

- 1. *Key Terrain* – any locality or area that affords a marked advantage to whichever combatant seizes, retains, or controls it.
- 2. *Observation* – what can be seen from a given feature.
- 3. *Cover and Concealment* – cover is protection from enemy fire; concealment is protection from enemy observation.

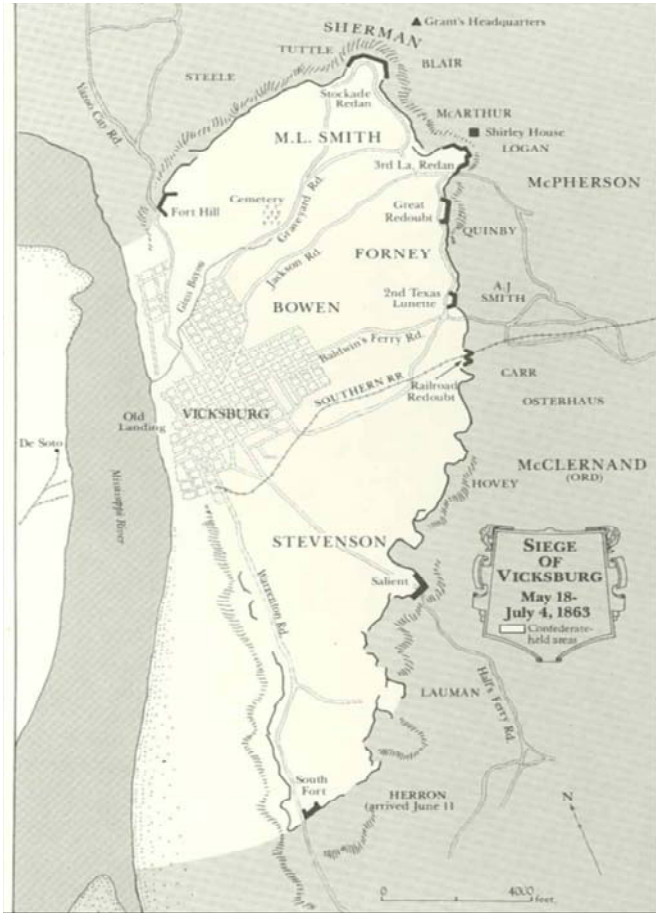
- 4. *Obstacles* – any natural or man-made feature that prevents, delays, or diverts the movement of military forces.
- 5. *Avenues of Approach* – as defined by General Robert E. Lee, how to get at “those people.”

The area encompassed by the present-day park will be examined for each of these characteristics, including mapping of significant features. Through this type of mapping, it can be determined which features were important to the outcome of the siege, and therefore should be considered for preservation and/or rehabilitation.

In conjunction with military landscape analysis, we will identify and analyze features comprising each of the other categories of landscape: commemorative, ecological, visitor services, and administrative.

The following “decision tree” table provides an example of various park landscape features (physical, visual, and functional) and method of suggesting priority for preservation and rehabilitation. Some features fit into more than one category.

MILITARY FEATURES (Priority – High, Med, Low)		VISITOR USE/ INTEPRETIVE FEATURES (Priority – High, Med, Low)		ECOLOGICAL FEATURES (Priority – High, Med, Low)	
Terrain		Tour Road		Endangered Species	
Trenches		Trails		Mint Springs	
Redans		Wayside Exhibits		Ravines	
Redoubts		Markers & Tablets		Bluffs	
Lunettes		Visitor Center		Forest Cover	
Railroad		Shirley House		Birds	
Shirley House		Living History Programs		Mammals	
Artifacts		Cairo Museum		etc.	
Cairo		etc.			
Approaches					
etc.					
ADMINISTRATIVE/ MITIGATION FEATURES (Priority – High, Med, Low)		COMMEMORATIVE FEATURES (Priority – High, Med, Low)			
On-/off-site Revegetation		State Monuments			
Adjacent Boundary conservation/management		Sculptures			
Conservation Easements		Existing Markers & Tablets			
Old Sup Quarters or Old Visitor Center		Missing Markers & Tablets			
Administrative Offices		Cannon/Carriages			
Maintenance Complex		etc.			
etc.					



National Park Service
Vicksburg National Military Park
Cultural Landscape Report/Environmental Assessment Comments
3201 Clay Street, Vicksburg, MS 39183-3495

COMMENT FORM
Key Landscape Features

Please provide us with feedback on the identification and analysis of the park's key landscape features considering the park's mandated mission and purpose. Please provide any additional ideas you would like to be considered. If you need more space, feel free to attach additional pages to this form. You may also comment via the National Park Service public comment website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>.

1. On what landscape features do you feel the park should focus preservation and rehabilitation efforts to:
 - a. fulfill the 1899 Congressional mandate to commemorate the campaign, siege, and defense of Vicksburg?
Why are these features important?

 - b. fulfill the National Park Service mission to conserve resources for the enjoyment of current and future generations?
Why are these features important?

2. What type of preservation/rehabilitation treatments would be beneficial to the park's landscape features? Why?

3. Prioritize values to be enhanced through landscape rehabilitation.

Priority (high, med, low)	Feature	Priority (high, med, low)	Feature
_____	Significant existing military features	_____	Threatened & endangered habitat
_____	Interpretive media in the landscape	_____	Wetlands
_____	Walking access to inaccessible sites	_____	Forest cover
_____	Existing tablets & markers	_____	Stream habitat (i.e., Mint Springs)
_____	State monuments	_____	Other ecological habitat
_____	Replacement of missing military features (trenches, forts, lines of fire, etc.)		
_____	Replacement of commemorative features (tablets, markers, etc.)		
_____	Other values (please specify):		

4. Other comments/thoughts?

Name: _____
Organization: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____

Date: _____

Please submit the completed form by July 26, 2007, to the above address.